

CONNECTICUT COUNCIL on
**PROBLEM
GAMBLING**

Presented By: Mary Drexler, MSW, Executive Director
CT Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG)

Public Testimony on Keno

My name is Mary Drexler and I am the executive Director of the CT Council on Problem Gambling.

First, I want to thank the Committee Chairs, Representative Dargan and Senator Hartley and the entire Public safety and Securities Committee for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Council and those individuals and families for whom the CT Council advocates on H.B. No. 5387.

We are in a time period in which states are seeking to increase their dependence on revenue from legalized gambling. The fiscal crises of states have lessened concern about the inevitable negative consequences of new gambling. Assuming that benefits will be great and costs will be minor without the data on which to base the decision to expand gambling is not fulfilling the government's duty to protect the public. Over time many legislators have been supportive of the prevention of problem gambling. Now with budget deficits it seems that some legislators are more focused on profit projections from expanding gambling and less focused on the costs to individuals, families, the workplace, and the community.

CCPG had expressed its concerns back in 2010 when Keno was first proposed during public testimony to the Finance Committee of the State legislature. Yet in 2013, Keno was passed as part of the Budget in the eleventh hour by the state legislature with no opportunity for public testimony and no apparent thought into the social impact of introducing Keno into restaurants, bars and retailer locations in our state.

Legalizing keno would be a significant expansion of gambling:

Thus far, in CT, electronic gambling has been available only at the tribal casinos. If keno becomes available in communities across CT, problem and underage gambling will increase as has happened elsewhere in the United States and other countries, often followed by a strong backlash from the community.

Legalizing keno would increase the risk of gambling and problem gambling among minors:

Government leaders, who are responsible for protecting minors, need to understand that children will be exposed to Keno gambling at the dining table in a restaurant and with repeated exposure. Not only would minors closely watch their parents gamble, but in many cases parents would invite their children to participate, as has been observed in other states in which keno is widespread in restaurants. It may seem perfectly normal for many parents to allow their children to participate in playing Keno at restaurants. Parents may make the assumption that if the state believed it was harmful for children to have such intimate exposure to this type of gambling, it would not have created this gambling opportunity in a family setting.

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Website: www.problemgambling.org

16 West Main Street
Clinton, CT 06413
860-664-3996

Legalizing keno would increase exposure and temptation to gamble for problem gamblers who are trying to stop and for recovering gamblers who have already stopped:

Gamblers in recovery are already faced with the temptation of lottery tickets sold in public places. Legalizing Keno would pose a new challenge for those in recovery. With keno, people will gamble at tables in restaurants that are in close proximity to those in recovery. Consumers may also clog aisles in convenience and other stores while waiting for keno results, often buying scratch tickets between each keno drawing adding to the difficulty already faced by those in recovery.

Legalizing keno will increase exposure to the pairing of gambling and alcohol in businesses where keno is played and alcohol is consumed:

With the legalization of Keno, it would also become available in a number of places where alcohol is served. Drinking alcohol while gambling can be dangerous. Alcohol is known to impair judgment which may result in loss of control over gambling.

When there is a fiscal need, the government has continually responded to address the problem through generating new gambling revenue:

Government often focuses on gambling's recreational and financial benefits. It needs to focus on the social costs as well. To date, there is no government sponsored study in CT that has measured the true extent of the social costs vs. benefits. The CCPG is not aware of any government proposal to address the issue of problem gambling based on the findings of the 2008 Division of Special Revenue sponsored evaluation of the effects of legalized gambling on the citizens of CT. The results of that study should have been used by the legislature to collaborate with experts in the field of problem gambling here in CT or surrounding states to examine the social impact versus economic gain. It is time for another study, as currently recommended in existing legislation, a study that is developed using the expertise of those in the field of problem gambling. Government has fallen tragically short in its responsibility to some of its most vulnerable citizens when it promotes and encourages people to gamble and does not adequately research the possible negative consequences of new types of gambling. The social impact of new gambling opportunities the legalization of Keno should be evaluated before it is ever legalized. At the very least, government is obligated to bolster prevention and treatment programs to meet the challenges of increased problem and underage gambling.

Closing:

Whether or not keno is legalized, current funding for problem and underage gambling services is insufficient and minuscule when compared to the enormous revenue generated from legalized gambling. Lawmakers must educate themselves about the correlation between increased legalized gambling opportunities and the increase in problem and underage gambling. If Keno is not repealed, an increase in funding for problem and underage gambling services is essential. The current lack of sufficient funding for problem gambling services is made clear in problem gambling literature. Financial losses of problem gamblers are disproportionately higher than non-problem gamblers; for example, a larger percentage of gambling revenue is derived from problem gamblers as opposed to non-problem gamblers.

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